



Leading Quality Addiction Treatment in the Northern Rockies

February 6, 2009

EXHIBIT 5
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT APPROPRIATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE

Good Morning. I am very pleased to be here to address the importance of continuing the funding of drug courts in Montana. My name is Melissa Larsen and I am a licensed addiction counselor at the Silver Leaf Center in Billings which is where Rimrock Foundation's criminal justice programs are. Rimrock Foundation has been the treatment provider for the Billings Adult Misdemeanor Drug Court since its inception three years ago, and I have been a lead counselor for the drug court throughout that time. I believe I am in a unique position to speak to the effectiveness of drug courts.

First, because the research nationally is clear--drug courts are the most successful diversion programs, saving dollars in reduced incarceration and recidivism. Secondly, here in Montana, I can tell you that the Billings Adult Misdemeanor Drug court, which is a misdemeanor criminal drug court, has reduced the days of incarceration of misdemeanor offenders at the Yellowstone County Detention Facility in Billings by 40%.

We have also seen a continual increase in the percentage of our drug court participants in achieving full-time employment. When we initiated our drug court, over 50% of drug court participants were unemployed. Today, the employment rate of our participants is 95%.

I could talk about many more important variables that contribute significantly to cost savings and cost benefit but for me, the human side of the equation is most important--lives are being reclaimed every day in our program as drug court clients are held accountable. They are provided quality treatment for an average of 13 months duration. And this is important--we know that the severely addicted patient requires a longer treatment track than is typically provided most addicts. In the drug court, treatment can continue for as long as the client needs it, followed by case management services and aftercare services to assure the client's successful re-integration into the community.

For too long, Montana has remained behind in initiating successful diversion programs that will reduce the need for jail and prison beds in the longer term. The 2007 Legislature was farsighted in establishing funding so Montana could begin to develop the results from effective diversion. I urge you to continue these vital funds, and I would be most pleased to respond to any questions you may have about how the drug court works.